

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3496

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, KS, K, US
SUBJ: TRILATERAL TALKS

1. I HAVE HAD OCCASION TO DISCUSS THE TRIPARTITE TALKS CONCEPT FURTHER WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER IN RECENT DAYS AND BELIEVE THAT HE AND THE ROK LEADERSHIP ARE PULLING BACK FROM THEIR VERY NEGATIVE INITIAL RESPONSE. WHILE THEY WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO HAVE THE NORTH REJECT THE IDEA OUT OF HAND, IN WHICH CASE THEY MIGHT EVEN BE WILLING TO ACCEPT IT, FOR THE PRESENT THEY SEEM TO BE INCLINED TO TAKE A MIDDLE POSITION NEITHER REJECTING NOR APPROVING THE CONCEPT. I BELIEVE IN THIS ATMOSPHERE WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CONSTRUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS.

2. AS WITH SO MANY THINGS HERE, INITIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH FONMIN OF DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES, PARTICULARLY A FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS, ARE DIFFICULT AT THE MOST SENIOR LEVELS. WE HAVE THEREFORE SUGGESTED TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT A MORE INFORMAL PROCEDURE BE ESTABLISHED AT THE BUREAU DIRECTOR/ POLCOUNS LEVEL FOR DISCUSSION OF TRILATEAL TALKS AND IN THE FUTURE OTHER DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES WHICH MAY ARISE FOR CONSIDERATION. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AGREES WITH US THAT SUCH A FORUM WOULD BE USEFUL BUT HAS NOT YET ACCEPTED THE SUGGESTION. WHILE WE MAY AT A LATER STAGE REQUIRE ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND FROM THE DEPARTMENT, WE BELIEVE FOR THE

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PRESENT WE HAVE SUFFICIENT MATERIAL TO BEGIN DISCUSSIONS HERE.

3. A MAJOR PART OF OUR CURRENT DIFFICULTY RESULTS FROM ROK CONCERN OVER OUR LONG-RANGE POLICY OBJECTIVE. THEY ARE AT PRESENT REACTING TO VAGUE CONCERN OVER WHAT THESE OBJECTIVES MAY BE. OUR AIM THROUGH THE INFORMAL MECHANISM

SUGGESTED WILL BE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT LONG-RANGE OBJECTIVES ARE IN PART THE RESULT OF CONSULTATION AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, TO DRAW OUT AND INVOLVE THE ROKG IN THE THOUGHT PROCESSES WHICH LEAD TO THE FORMULATION OF SUCH OBJECTIVES.

4. WHILE THESE INFORMAL DISUCSSIONS MAY NOT PRODUCE DRAMATIC RESULTS IN THE SHORT TERM, I BELIEVE THEY HAVE SIGNIFICANT LONG-RANGE POTENTIAL. I AM ALSO CONCERNED THAT THIS PROCESS GET UNDERWAY IN ADVANCE OF DR BRZEZINSKI'S VISIT. IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO BRING SOME OF THE ISSUES TO A STAGE WHERE THEY CAN BE MEANINGFUL ADDRESSED DURING THAT VISIT.

5. WE WILL OF COURSE KEEP THE DEPARTMENT ADVISED OF ANY DEVELOPMENTS WHICH RESULT FROM THESE DISCUSSIONS.
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